

**Iowa Alternate Assessment  
Parent Guide Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)  
Revised July, 2013**

This guide provides information on Iowa's Alternate Assessment for parents. A question-and-answer format is used to summarize information. Please contact Emily Thatcher, Alternate Assessment Consultant at [Emily.thatcher@iowa.gov](mailto:Emily.thatcher@iowa.gov) or at 515-281-3500 for additional information regarding the Iowa Alternate Assessment.

**IAA Background/Policy**

<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer</b>
<b>What is an Alternate Assessment?</b>	An alternate assessment is an assessment designed for a small number of students with disabilities who are unable to participate in the regular grade level Iowa Assessments even with appropriate accommodations.
<b>What is the purpose of an Alternate Assessment?</b>	The purpose of the Iowa alternate assessment (IAA) is to assess the educational performance of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities in: O Reading O Mathematics O Science The alternate assessment ensures students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum.
<b>Why does Iowa have an Alternate Assessment (IAA)?</b>	<i>The Elementary and Secondary Act, last reauthorized as No Child Left Behind</i> requires that all students, even those with the most significant cognitive disabilities, have access to the general education curriculum. For accountability purposes, all students in grades 3-8 and at a high school grade must be assessed on performance against grade level state content standards. In addition, the <i>Individual with Disabilities Act (IDEA)</i> also requires students with disabilities to have access to the general education curriculum and participate in the statewide assessment system. Alternate assessment allows students who cannot participate in the general assessment, to be assessed more equitably given their current performance.
<b>What is the ESEA?</b>	<i>The Elementary and Secondary Act, last reauthorized as No Child Left Behind</i> is federal government legislation that requires that all students (including those with disabilities) have access to general education curriculum and be assessed on their performance.
<b>What is IDEA?</b>	The <i>Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)</i> is federal government legislation that requires students with disabilities to participate in the statewide assessment
<b>Who should participate in the IAA?</b>	Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The IEP team, which includes parents, uses state participation guidelines (found on the Department IAA Website) to determine eligibility for alternate assessment Students in grades 3-8 , 10 and 11 participate in the reading and mathematics alternate assessment and students in grades 5, 8, and 11 participate in the science alternate assessment. Students in Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2, 9, or 12 do not need to be assessed <i>unless</i> the district gives a reading, mathematics, and/or science assessment to all

	<p>students in those particular grades. In that case, rating scales developed for the grade nearest to the student's grade <i>could</i> be administered as an assessment, but there are no performance levels for these grades. Results at Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2, 9, or 12, count for Chapter 72 reporting, but results do not need to be sent to the Iowa Department of Education for purposes of Adequate Yearly Progress determination.</p>		
<b>What are consequences of participating in the IAA?</b>	<p>The consequences of participating in alternate assessment, beyond access to and participation in the general curriculum, is that some students who historically have received a parallel or a different "functional" curriculum may now have part of their school day devoted to instruction aligned to grade level content that all students in their school receive. All students with disabilities in Iowa graduate with a regular diploma, and alternate assessment participation will not impact the type of diploma your child will receive when your child completes the course of study outlined in their IEP.</p>		
<b>When is the IAA administered?</b>	<p>The Iowa Alternate Assessment is an instructionally embedded assessment. It is administered from the start of school to April 4, 2014.</p>		
<b>What is the alternate assessment process?</b>	<p>The process consists of evidenced-based rating scales, which focus on student knowledge and skills in reading, mathematics, and science. The process requires teachers to generate classroom-based student evidence. These rating scale items are aligned to the Iowa Core Content Standards and Benchmarks.</p>		
<b>What are Content Standards and Benchmarks?</b>	<p>Content Standards and Benchmarks define what students should know and be able to do. The Iowa Core Content Standards and Benchmarks describe what students should be doing in grade 3-8, 10 &amp; 11 in reading and mathematics, and grades 5, 8, and 11 in science.</p>		
<b>What content areas and grades does the IAA assess?</b>	<p>Reading is assessed at grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 &amp; 11. Math is assessed at grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 &amp; 11. Science is assessed at grades 5, 8, and 11.</p>		
<b>What are achievement standards?</b>	<p>Achievement standards are the standards in which performance is based and compared. Achievement standards have three components:</p>		
	<b>1 – Performance levels</b> label each level of achievement	<b>2 – Performance Descriptors</b> (for example...)	<b>3 – Cut scores</b> separate the different levels of performance (for example...)
	Basic	Reflect what students know	0-50 scores= basic performance
	Proficient	Reflect what students know	51-100 = proficient performance
<b>Why is the IAA based on alternate achievement standards?</b>	Advanced	Reflect what children can apply/generalize	101 and higher= advanced performance
	<p>Students have the right to be assessed fairly. The alternate assessment measures student progress on Iowa's Core Content Standards and Benchmarks at a reduced complexity, and is judged against a different definition of proficiency than the ITBS/ITED. Student's participation will most likely be supported by:  <input type="checkbox"/> Assistive technology   <input type="checkbox"/> Prompting and cueing strategies  <input type="checkbox"/> Adaptations</p>		

<b>Who should participate in the Iowa Alternate Assessment?</b>	Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The IEP team, which includes parents, uses state participation guidelines (found on the Department IAA Website) to determine eligibility for alternate assessment. Students in grades 3-8 and 11 participate in the reading and mathematics alternate assessment and students in grades 5, 8, and 11 participate in the science alternate assessment. Students in Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2, 9, or 12 do not need to be assessed <i>unless</i> the district gives a reading, mathematics, and/or science assessment to all students in those particular grades. In that case, rating scales developed for the grade nearest to the student's grade <i>could</i> be administered as an assessment, but there are no performance levels for these grades. Results at Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2, 9, or 12, count for Chapter 72 reporting, but results do not need to be sent to the Iowa Department of Education for purposes of Adequate Yearly Progress determination.
<b>Can a student be exempted from the Iowa Alternate Assessment?</b>	No! Every student is to be tested, even those students with the most significant
<b>Is parental permission required for students with disabilities to participate in the IAA process?</b>	cognitive disabilities (even those with medical conditions -teachers are required to teach ). Not testing certain students will affect a local school district's participation and <i>Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)</i> rates. An IEP Team cannot make the decision to opt out students from the Iowa Alternate Assessment (IAA).
<b>Can parents refuse to have their child included in the alternate assessment?</b>	Teachers should do their best with medical needs that result in frequent absences or who's medical needs impact their attention span. Students who are receiving homebound instruction must be assessed also, even, if only a few skills are taught and assessed. If your student receives homebound services contact Emily Thatcher, Iowa Dept of Education before completing student profile activities in the IAA online system. Remember, the assessment is a year-long process, so to say, "we need to exclude this child from the testing window" means that the child is being excluded from participating in the general curriculum.
<b>Can a student participate in the IAA in one content area and participate in the ITBS in another content area?</b>	Yes. Students who can meaningfully participate in any portion of the general assessment should do so.
<b>Can the IEP be used as the alternate assessment?</b>	<i>No Child Left Behind</i> in Non- Regulatory Guidance to states is quite clear. The IEP cannot be used as an alternate assessment.

## IAA Process

<b>What are the steps in the IAA process?</b>	<p>The alternate assessment has several steps. Once the IEP team has determined participation, the teacher will do the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Describe student characteristics using a general survey</li> <li>2. Rate students after instruction using rating scales that focus on reading, math, and science.</li> <li>3. Use evidence gathered as part of the student's school program to support the ratings</li> <li>4. Review results with building administrators and parents</li> <li>5. Complete a survey about the process and supports needed to better meet the needs of students</li> </ol>
<b>What is a rating scale?</b>	<p>These scales in reading, mathematics, and science are a list of essential skills and knowledge for each grade and content area tested. Over the course of several months, a teacher gathers information that results in a rating of the student's achievement of these skills and knowledge. These scores are based on alternate achievement standards which NCLB allows states to develop to determine proficiency of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.</p>
<b>How do parents review the rating scales?</b>	<p>Parents may review the rating scales by asking a teacher or viewing them on the Iowa Department of Education website - <a href="http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&amp;task=view&amp;id=461&amp;Itemid=1576">http://educateiowa.gov/index.php?option=com_content&amp;task=view&amp;id=461&amp;Itemid=1576</a></p>
<b>May parents request a copy of their IAA results?</b>	<p>At the end of the testing period, teachers will provide a report to give to parents that summarizes their child's performance on the alternate assessment for that academic year.</p>
<b>Is the IEP the curriculum for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities?</b>	<p>The IEP represents skills that the IEP team has prioritized for the student, that require on- going monitoring and are evaluated annually. Hence, while the IEP certainly represents educational priorities and supports to achieve those educational priorities for the individual student, it does not represent the entire range of curriculum; nor does it represent the academic standards upon which a curriculum should be based.</p>
<b>How does instruction change for students as a result of participating in the IAA?</b>	<p>Students participating in the alternate assessment receive instruction on grade level Iowa Core Essential Elements. IEP teams review participation annually, and it is expected that as students become more proficient on more skills, that students would be considered for exit from the alternate assessment against alternate achievement standards, into the Iowa Assessments and the Iowa Core Standards..</p> <p>Students must participate in the alternate assessment because participation ensures that the general curriculum is taught to students with severe disabilities</p>
<b>Is it possible to learn both academic and functional skills at the same time?</b>	<p>Currently many children with the most significant cognitive disabilities have IEP goals that focus on learning life skills. NCLB and IDEA recognizes that students with the most significant cognitive disabilities can learn both functional and academic skills at the same time. That is, we should not wait to teach a child to</p>

	read until they have mastered functional skills. Many students with significant cognitive disabilities thrive by learning academic content while they are learning life skills, just as their typical peers do.
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